Reaches my skin

—“Stay in this moment for life, stay with me

From my fingertips to the far edge of my mind.”

SHINee – Atmos

The camera lenses were on the table, uncovered. The sofa cushions were askew. Every time Tui glanced down at the mess, Lego was right there, following his internal struggle with a quiet, unblinking intensity. Lego sat on the rug, his feet tucked neatly under the low wooden coffee table, while Tui's laptop and Lego's phone lay side-by-side on the surface between them.

Usually, Tui filled the space with the comforting, grounding sound of a broom sweeping across the tiles, the clinking of plates, or the familiar rhythm of making coffee. Without those sounds to hide behind, the apartment felt terribly, suffocatingly small. They could hear each other breathing. They could hear the low, rhythmic hum of the refrigerator.

Lego had arrived at his apartment that morning carrying breakfast, hiding behind the easy excuse that he simply owed it to Tui from the breakfast he'd brought to Lego's apartment the morning before, back when Hong had stayed over. In the background, his record player was spinning a Placebo record, the melancholic chords doing little to cut through the domestic gravity of the room.

Lego was still slowly sipping his iced tea and eating fruit at the coffee table. He looked strangely sweet today, a stark contrast to his usual sharp, performative energy. His long black hair was tied back in two loose pigtails, and he wore a simple white tank top with worn blue jeans that sat low enough to slightly reveal his underwear at his hips. A loose, oversized sweater hung off one of his shoulders, making him look smaller, softer, and entirely undefended.

"I feel anxious," Lego said suddenly, breaking the comfortable silence. He sighed, setting down his glass with a soft clink. "I hate Hong. He hasn't said a word since this morning."

Tui looked up from where he'd been pretending to organize his camera equipment. "He's probably just—"

"Spiraling? Having a breakdown? Finally being honest with Nut?" Lego interrupted, his voice carrying an edge of worry that belied his casual posture. "All of the above?"

"Probably all of the above," Tui admitted quietly. He set down the lens he'd been cleaning and moved to sit on the floor beside Lego, their shoulders nearly touching.

"But Hong promised you he'd be brave. Give him time."

Lego leaned forward to pick up a piece of fruit, and his loose sweater slipped off his shoulder, revealing the smooth expanse of his skin. The everyday, domestic intimacy became too intense to ignore—the golden light painting Lego's bare shoulder, the soft sound of his breathing.

Tui's breath caught.

Just as he opened his mouth to speak—to say something, anything to break the suffocating weight of all the things he'd been holding back—Lego reached over and pulled Tui's laptop closer.

"What's your password?" Lego asked, his fingers hovering over the keyboard.

"You already know it," Tui said, his voice coming out rougher than he intended.

Lego smiled and typed in the familiar sequence. The laptop unlocked, revealing Tui's desktop: a carefully organized grid of folders labeled by date and location.

Lego scrolled through the folders with the ease of someone who had done this before, his curiosity leading him deeper into Tui's archive. He found photos from Tui's university, everyday snapshots of the city, photos of their group of friends laughing in dimly lit bars and bright cafés.

And then he found the folder.

It was labeled simply: Halloween 2024.

Lego's fingers stilled on the trackpad. He glanced sideways at Tui, who had gone very still beside him.

"Can I?" Lego asked softly.

Tui nodded, not trusting his voice.

Lego opened the folder.

The screen filled with images—dozens of them, all from the same night. The low light and the fog and the red. Lego suspended in midair, wrapped in crimson silk, his body a study in perfect lines and impossible grace. The ribbon was suspended from a rig at the center of the venue, the white skin catching the colored lights. Black hair. Bare feet. The feet wrapped in the silk, the toes pointed, the arch of the foot a curve so precise it looked like poetry.

And the dress—gray and white, the fabric light and flowing, moving with him as he spun and fell and caught himself again and again.

Beautiful.

Lego scrolled through the images slowly, his breath coming shorter with each new frame. These weren't the polished, theatrical shots that had been posted online or used in promotional materials. These were raw, unguarded moments: Lego's face caught mid-breath, exhaustion flickering across his features; the exact second his feet touched the mat and his entire body went slack with relief; the way he'd looked up at the lights, his expression open and vulnerable and achingly human.

"These are from when we first met," Lego murmured, his voice losing its playful edge. "I didn't think you still had them."

Tui had always wanted more. More of Lego. More than friendship. But Tui hadn't said so. He was afraid of breaking something precious by asking for more than what was offered.

So he accepted what was offered. He accepted the friendship. He accepted the phone number, the messages, the invitations to events, the backstage conversations, the way Lego looked at him when he was tired, the way Lego called him P'Tui with that tenderness—those syllables brimming with trust.

He accepted what was offered and kept it carefully.

And he didn't ask for more.

But over time, the words slipped out when he was around Lego, always saying and admitting more than he wanted.

"I never delete anything," Tui said quietly, his eyes fixed on the screen.

Lego turned to look at him fully, his light-colored contact lenses catching the blue glow of the laptop. "You took this before you even knew my name."

Tui didn't respond immediately. The Placebo record finally reached the final groove, the needle gently scraping the vinyl with a rhythmic, hypnotic scratch that filled the small room.

He sat down slowly on the rug beside Lego, closing the small distance between them until their knees were touching. It was a suffocating closeness—too much and not enough all at once.

"I didn't need to know your name," Tui said finally, his voice low and careful, as if each word was a confession he'd been holding back for years. "All I knew was that you were beautiful and I wanted to hold onto the memory of what I saw."

Lego caught his breath, his posture softening as he felt the weight of Tui's confession settle over them both. The quiet tranquility of the apartment vanished, replaced by a dense, suffocating intimacy that made the air feel thick and hard to breathe.

"Tui—" Lego started, but his voice faltered.

"I'm sorry," Tui said quickly, pulling back slightly, his hands curling into fists on his thighs. "I shouldn't have said that. I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. I just —"

"Stop," Lego interrupted gently. He reached out and placed his hand on Tui's tense forearm, his touch warm and grounding. "Don't apologize. Please."

Tui looked down at Lego's hand on his arm, the warmth of the touch seeping through his skin like proof that this moment was real, that he hadn't just imagined the shift in the air between them. But when Lego looked at him with that familiar, radiant kindness, Tui felt a familiar, stabbing pain in his chest.

And that was the problem, wasn't it?

Lego was kind. Lego never said no. Lego touched everyone like that: he'd effortlessly lean on Nut's shoulder when he was tired, put his arms around Hong's neck to snap him out of a bad mood, reluctantly pull a quiet William into long, tight hugs just to make him smile.

That was Lego. It didn't mean anything. It didn't mean he wanted Tui the way Tui wanted him so desperately.

For months, Tui had shielded himself behind the safe and respectable title of responsible older brother, using it to gain Lego's closeness while settling for the crumbs of universal affection Lego bestowed on everyone. He had convinced himself that being a protective shield was enough, that keeping quiet was the only way to keep Lego in his life.

But seeing Lego now, so close that Tui could feel the soft warmth of his breath in the silent living room, the title of "older brother" felt like a death sentence.

Then the sound of the record player starting to play the vinyl from the beginning interrupted them—the opening chords of a slow, melancholic Placebo song filling the room.

Tui's mind flashed back to the very night they met at that red-lit Halloween circus event. He had captured forty-seven raw, unguarded photographs of Lego suspended in the air—a gravity-defying composition of red silk and pure vulnerability.

When Lego had laughed that night, the sound had traveled straight into Tui's chest, settling in the exact same spot where the deep bass of his childhood beach days used to live.

It was the second music he had ever loved.

"Why did you keep these?" Lego asked, his voice barely above a whisper. His fingers

were still resting lightly on Tui's forearm, and Tui could feel his pulse throbbing against Lego's palm—a frantic, ineffable rhythm he could no longer easily conceal.

"Because I couldn't let you go," Tui admitted, the words tumbling out before he could stop them. "Even then, when I didn't know your name, when you were just this—this incredible, untouchable person spinning in the air—I knew I wanted to keep you. In whatever way I could."

Lego's grip on his arm tightened. "Tui—"

"I know it's selfish," Tui continued, his voice cracking slightly. "I know I don't have the right to feel this way. You're my friend. You trust me. And I've been—I've been hiding behind that trust because I was too scared to ask for more. Too scared that if I told you the truth, I'd lose you completely."

"What truth?" Lego asked, his eyes searching Tui's face with an intensity that made Tui's chest ache.

Tui swallowed hard, his eyes slowly rising to meet Lego's gaze. His foolish heart, seeing Lego so close in the morning light, still clung to a desperate, stubborn hope.

"That I'm in love with you," Tui said, the confession breaking free like a dam finally giving way. "I've been in love with you since the night we met. Since you looked up at me like I was the only person in the room. Since you asked me to coffee and laughed at my terrible jokes and trusted me with your secrets. I've been in love with you, Lego, and I've been too much of a coward to say it."

Lego didn't respond immediately. He just stared at Tui, his light-colored lenses reflecting the glow of the laptop screen, his expression unreadable.

Tui's heart sank. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have—"

But before he could finish, Lego moved. He closed the distance between them in one fluid motion, his hands coming up to cup Tui's jaw as he pulled him into a kiss.

The kiss was deep and comforting, a sudden release from the stifling silence that had filled the apartment. Lego's mouth was warm and insistent, and Tui's entire body went rigid with shock before melting into the touch.

Tui's hands moved automatically to Lego's waist, his thumbs brushing against the exposed skin of his hips just above the low waistband of his jeans. The contact was electric—Tui's fingers met incredibly soft, warm skin. It felt unfiltered, raw, and completely real, matching the old photographs that still lingered frozen on the laptop screen behind them.

Lego leaned into the touch, a soft, breathless sound catching in his throat as Tui's grip on his waist tightened. The loose, oversized sweater slipped completely down one of his arms, pooling at his elbow and leaving him entirely exposed to the warm,

heavy air of the room.

There was no stage costume here, no protective alternative social armor, no carefully curated performance. It was just Lego, letting himself be held by the only person who had ever looked past the display piece to see the bruises underneath.

When they finally separated, neither of them moved far. Lego rested his forehead against Tui's chest, his breath coming in short, uneven gasps. Tui kept his hands on the bare skin of Lego's hips, drawing slow, comforting circles with his thumbs, anchoring them both to the floor of the small apartment.

Then Lego cried.

Lego's sudden, silent gasp caught Tui completely off guard. A warm tear slipped down, soaking the fabric of Tui's shirt. The ever-responsible caregiver immediately panicked, sliding his hands from Lego's waist to gently cradle his face.

"Hey, hey, don't cry," Tui pleaded, his voice tinged with a raw, protective desperation. He tilted Lego's face upward, dabbing away the moisture that trickled down his lower lashes with his thumbs. "Did I—did I do something wrong? I'm sorry, I shouldn't have—"

Lego looked up at him, his eyes brimming with tears, blinking in the soft blue glow of the laptop screen. He let out a wet, breathless laugh, a sound somewhere between frustration and relief.

"No, you idiot," Lego said, his voice cracking as he glanced down at his hands, still tangled in Tui's shirt. He sniffed, a small, self-deprecating smile fighting back tears. "I was supposed to confess my feelings romantically. I had it all planned out, Tuitui. It was going to be charming and perfect...like the characters in soap operas. I wasn't supposed to ruin it by complaining about Hong, stealing your laptop, and sobbing uncontrollably on the floor."

Tui exhaled a low, incredibly soft sigh, the knot of anxiety in his chest completely unraveling. A wave of deep warmth replaced it. He leaned in, resting his forehead against Lego's, and closed his eyes as the sweet, chemical scent of Lego's strawberry cologne enveloped him.

"You didn't ruin anything," Tui whispered, his voice thick with a vulnerability he had never allowed himself to voice until this exact moment. "You're perfect. This is perfect. I don't need charming or planned. I just need you."

Lego let out another soft, wet laugh, his fingers curling tighter into Tui's shirt. "You're too good to me."

"No," Tui said firmly, pulling back just enough to look at Lego's tear-streaked face. "I'm not good enough. I've been hiding from you for months because I was too

scared to be honest. I let you think I only saw you as a friend when all I wanted was —" He stopped, his voice catching.

"What?" Lego asked, his voice barely above a whisper. "What did you want?"

"Everything," Tui said simply. "I wanted everything with you. I wanted to hold you like this. I wanted to kiss you. I wanted to be the person you came to when you were scared or tired or happy. I wanted to be more than just the responsible older brother. I wanted to be yours."

Lego's breath hitched, fresh tears spilling down his cheeks. "You are," he said, his voice breaking. "You've always been mine, Tui. I've been in love with you for so long, and I thought—I thought you only saw me as someone to take care of. Someone to protect. I didn't think you could ever want me the way I wanted you."

Tui's hands came up to frame Lego's face, his thumbs gently wiping away the tears. "How could I not want you?" he asked, his voice rough with emotion. "You're the most beautiful person I've ever met. Not just because of how you look, but because of who you are. You're kind and brave and you see people—really see them—in a way that makes them feel like they matter. You make me feel like I matter."

Lego closed his eyes, leaning into Tui's touch. "You do matter. You matter so much."

Tui leaned down and kissed him again, but this time the urgency was gone. The kiss was slow and deep, a languid exploration that spoke of all the months of wanting and waiting finally finding their release.

Lego's hands slid up from Tui's shirt to tangle in his hair, pulling him closer until there was no space left between them. Tui's large, calloused hands slid down to gather Lego closer, lifting him slightly so Lego was tucked completely into his lap.

When the kiss deepened, Lego let out a soft, contented sigh against Tui's lips, his body going completely pliable and warm.

The hard floor eventually became uncomfortable. Between deep, lingering kisses, keeping one hand firmly anchored on Lego's bare hip, Tui hooked his other arm under Lego's thighs. He effortlessly shifted his weight to stand, lifting Lego completely off the carpet.

Lego automatically wrapped his legs around Tui's waist, his simple white tank top bunching up, his hands tangling deeper into Tui's shirt as Tui carried him the short distance to press him back onto the askew cushions of the sofa.

"Wait," Lego murmured against Tui's mouth, his voice breathless. "Not the couch."

Tui pulled back slightly, his eyes dark and questioning. "No?"

Lego shook his head, a slow, knowing smile curving his lips. "Bed," he said simply, the single word hanging in the warm air of the living room, heavy with a mutual, unspoken understanding.

Tui didn't answer with words. He simply tightened his grip around Lego's waist, grounding them both for a split second before he moved. With a smooth, deliberate strength that completely collapsed his old, careful boundaries, Tui slipped his arms back under Lego's thighs and lifted him from the askew sofa cushions.

Lego wrapped his legs tightly around Tui's hips again, burying his face into the crook of Tui's neck as he was carried down the short, familiar hallway. The oversized sweater was left forgotten on the couch, leaving Lego stripped down to just the simple white tank top and his worn jeans, completely yielding to the man holding him.

"You're torturing me, you know?" Tui murmured against Lego's ear, his voice deep and hoarse.

Lego let out a soft, breathless laugh. "Am I?"

"You know exactly what you're doing," Tui said, his grip tightening on Lego's thighs.

"Maybe I just wanted you closer." Lego murmured, his long, manicured nails digging into the fabric of Tui's shirt.

When they reached the bedroom, Tui didn't hesitate. He crossed the threshold and lowered Lego onto the dark sheets, following him down so their bodies remained pressed together.

Lego slid back onto the mattress. His pigtails had come loose during the journey from the living room, and his black hair now spread across the white pillowcase like ink spilled on paper.

Tui hovered over him, his large frame creating a dark, enclosed canopy that shut out the rest of the apartment, the city, and the lingering ghosts of the morning. The sheets under them were dark, a deep contrast to the stark white of Lego's tight tank top.

Tui supported his weight on his forearms, keeping his large frame close enough that Lego could feel the rapid, echoing thud of his heart, but his hands took their time. His fingers slid down to the rigid denim of Lego's worn blue jeans.

Lego caught his breath, his abdominal muscles contracting beautifully as he arched his hips slightly off the mattress to help Tui guide the heavy fabric down his legs. When the jeans hit the floor with a soft, heavy thud, Lego was left entirely undefended—just the tight white tank top and the delicate white lace panties against the dark expanse of the bed.

Tui's breath caught at the sight. "You're so beautiful," he whispered, his voice reverent.

Lego reached up, his manicured nails digging lightly into the skin of Tui's shoulders to pull him down. "Then stop looking and touch me."

When their mouths met again, the cold, sharp click of Lego's tongue piercing against Tui's lips acted as a striking, electric reminder of the boy's sharp public edge—even while his entire body was soft, warm, and completely yielding underneath him.

Tui's hands moved with deliberate slowness, tracing the lines of Lego's body with the same careful attention he gave to his photography—cataloging every curve, every texture, every sound Lego made as his touch grew bolder.

"If you want to stop, we'll stop." Tui said, pulling back just enough to look at Lego's face.

Lego only responded with another kiss, deeper this time, more insistent. His hands slid under Tui's shirt, pulling it up and over his head before tossing it aside to join the growing pile of discarded clothing.

"I don't want to stop," Lego whispered against Tui's mouth. "I've wanted this for so long. Wanted you for so long."

Tui's hands found the edge of Lego's tank top, his fingers curling under the hem. "Can I?"

Lego nodded, lifting his arms to help Tui pull the fabric up and over his head. When it was gone, Lego lay bare against the dark sheets, his skin glowing in the golden afternoon light that filtered through the window.

Tui took a moment just to look at him—at the delicate lines of his collarbones, the soft curve of his stomach, the way his chest rose and fell with each unsteady breath.

"Look at me, baby," Tui said softly, his voice a low rumble that sent shivers down Lego's spine.

Lego's eyes fluttered open, meeting Tui's gaze with an intensity that stole the breath from both of them.

Tui leaned down, pressing a kiss to the hollow of Lego's throat, then lower, tracing a path down his chest with his lips. When Tui's fingers lightly grazed the edge of the white lace panties, Lego let out a sharp gasp, his abdominal muscles contracting tightly.

"Tui," Lego breathed, his voice breaking on the single syllable.

Tui paused, looking up at him. "Tell me what you want."

"You," Lego said simply. "All of you. Please."

And Tui, who had spent months holding back, who had hidden behind the safe title of responsible older brother, finally let go.

Later, the frantic heat of the room settled into a heavy, peaceful exhaustion. The harsh morning light had softened into a lazy, golden afternoon, filtering through the small bedroom window and casting long blocks of amber across the tangled sheets.

Lego lay sprawled across Tui's chest, his body warm and pliant, his breathing slow and even. He was wearing one of Tui's oversized t-shirts and his own underwear—the cotton fabric a bit too big, clinging to his small frame and smelling faintly of Tui's clean cologne.

Tui's hand traced lazy patterns on Lego's back, his fingers occasionally tangling in the loose strands of black hair that had come free from the pigtails.

"I can't believe that just happened," Lego murmured, his voice muffled against Tui's chest.

Tui smiled, pressing a kiss to the top of Lego's head. "Do you regret it?"

"No," Lego said immediately, lifting his head to look at Tui. "Not even a little. Do you?"

"Not for a second," Tui said, his hand coming up to cup Lego's face. "I just wish I'd been brave enough to do this sooner."

Lego leaned into the touch, his eyes soft. "We're here now. That's what matters."

Tui was about to respond when his phone, still lying on the nightstand, lit up with a notification. The screen glowed in the dim room, casting a soft light across their faces. Lego reached over to look at the screen, his loose hair falling over his shoulders. The custom design of his nails gently brushed against Tui's palm as they read the bright screen together.

It was from Hong, in the group chat. A simple, reassuring message.

HONG: We're okay. We're at Nut's.

Lego let out a soft, relieved laugh. "Looks like they've made up."

Tui smiled, his thumb brushing against Lego's cheek. "Looks like it."

Lego set the phone back down and crawled completely onto Tui, mapping his body

against Tui's larger frame. The oversized t-shirt rode up slightly, emphasizing the soft skin Tui's hands had been tracing earlier.

"I'm glad they're okay," Lego said softly. "But I'm more glad we're okay."

Tui reached up to gently comb his fingers through Lego's loose, untied black hair, spreading the dark strands across the white pillowcase. "We're more than okay," he murmured.

Lego leaned down to capture his lips in a deep, comforting kiss that sealed the promise: no more hiding behind the title of the responsible older brother.

When they pulled apart, Lego rested his forehead against Tui's, his eyes shining with a contentment Tui had never seen before.

"I love you," Lego whispered.

Tui's chest tightened with emotion. "I love you too. So much."

They lay like that for a long time, tangled in each other, the golden afternoon light painting them in warmth. Outside, the city continued its relentless hum, but in Tui's small bedroom, the world had narrowed to just the two of them—two people who had finally found the courage to be honest, to be vulnerable, to be together.

And for the first time in months, Tui felt like he could breathe.

In the group chat, the notifications continued to pile up as the others saw Hong's message. William sent a simple thumbs-up emoji. Nut added a heart, and the anxious messages Lego had sent earlier that morning were already buried under the cascade of responses.

But there was one person who hadn't responded yet. Est.

“He's seen it,” Lego said, pointing his custom-nailed finger at the read receipts on the screen. “He hasn't replied to a single thing in the group chat for a week. It's weird—I really thought we were close.”

Tui's grip on Lego’s waist tightened slightly, a grounding presence. "He'll come around. He just needs time."

"Maybe," Lego said, though the lingering shadow in his eyes suggested he wasn't entirely convinced.

Before he could overthink it, a separate notification banner popped up on the screen. It was a direct message from Hong.

Hong: Thank you for not letting me disappear.

Lego read the words twice, his eyelashes fluttering as his eyes grew misty all over again.

"He's going to be okay," Tui murmured, reading the sudden softening of Lego's expression. "They both are."

"I know." Lego let out a breath that was half-sigh, half-relief. He turned the phone completely off, setting it back on the nightstand next to the uncovered lenses, and let his head drop back onto Tui's chest. "But I'm still worried about Est. He's been so quiet lately."

Tui pulled Lego closer, tucking his smaller frame completely into his arms, letting the oversized white T-shirt bunch up between them. "Est is dealing with a lot right now. But he's strong. He'll figure things out."

“It just feels like he was using me the whole time,” Lego said quietly, his voice muffled against Tui's skin. “Asking me all those questions... and then when I wasn’t useful anymore, he just went after P’Nut. I thought he was like Hong at first—you know, just someone who has a hard time making friends. But as time goes on, he just seems more distant. I don’t know what’s going through his head.”

He fell silent for a moment, listening to the steady, comforting beat of Tui's heart. Then, Lego looked up through his dark lashes, a slight, characteristically resilient smile returning to his face. He let out a dramatic groan, kicking his feet texturing against the tangled bedsheets in a burst of mock frustration.

“Ugh, whatever. It doesn’t matter anymore,” Lego complained playfully, completely breaking the heavy mood. He leaned up to press a quick, demanding kiss to Tui's jaw. “I'm exhausted from caring so much. Let’s order some food.”